In the 1920’s smoking was cool, in the 1960’s smoking was sexy and in the 1970’s smoking was weight loss method. Cigarettes advertisements have had one of the most versatile campaigns. Today, the advertisements we see concerning smoking are all about how to quit; never encouraging it. This Nicotinell Extra Strength gum advertisement promotes an alternative to smoking to get you to quit. The ad uses empathy and fear to convey the message that smoking is harmful and causes premature aging (as the tagline says). The advertisement shows an elderly woman trying to light her cigarette with the candles from a birthday cake. I was drawn to this advertisement for two specific
reasons. The first is the concept of smoking and how in today’s culture it is not cool, sexy or a dieting technique; it’s actually the opposite. Young adults either take two stance, they refuse to smoke (and advocate against it) because they are aware of the harm it does to your body or they smoke because they are addicted and don’t care to quite (not because of the image it gives off). My generation is more self-health conscious and thinks being healthy and fit is cool, which is a huge advancement from how it used to be. The second reason I chose this ad is for the way they chose to display their message isn’t how the message of anti-smoking is normally displayed. There are many subtle signs that tie the whole piece together and make it influential.

The ad embodies multiple signs, such as the Old Women, who signifies premature aging. The black patches on her skin signifies her poor health, the “42” candles signifies her actual age. The women herself is an Iconic sign while the act of her lighting her Cigarette is the Indexical sign. The Signifier is the women who is dressed nicely (wearing nice clothes and jewelry) and has her hair and nails done, this is signifying that she cares about her appearance and how shoe looks even though by lighting that cigarette she is deteriorating her skin. The green plants and sunlight (signifier) in the background signify life, which is ironic because smoking cigarettes kills lives. The linguistic sign of the sub-tagline: “lose the smoke, keep the fire this World No Tobacco Day, 31st May” ties in nicely with the idea of an old women because the use of the word fire is signifying the fire within herself and if you quit smoking you can stay young and keep that fire within you going. The syntagm of the ad (or at least how I saw it) is first you see the old women, then you notice the age on the birthday cake and it’s a shock and then lastly you notice the cigarette. I think this order is so important in reading the ad because each time you
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notice something different it is so shocking that it makes the advertisement resonate with you. The tagline reads, “Smoking Causes premature Aging” I think it works well because it is short and to the point. The Paradigm sets up the picture’s theme that is being alluded too. Without this line, we would be left to infer so many things. Why is this old woman in front of someone else’s cake? Why do we care that she’s lighting her cigarette with the candles? The tagline along with the signs makes this message very clear.

The ad’s main focus is the women, detonated she is old with bad skin, probably in her late 70’s early 80s. The woman is wearing oversized round-framed glasses and pearl earrings with a gold base. She has her nails painted a soft rose color and she is wearing a thick (shoulder padded) blue blazer with a light blue button- down shirt. Connoted the elderly woman is actually in her forties and she looks older because she doesn’t take care of herself thus the bad skin. The over-sized round-framed glasses and the pearl earing with the gold base are typical accessories for women in there 70s, giving off the aura that she is dressed for the way she looks. The Shoulder-padded blazer was a big fad a few decades back which shows she (again like the glasses and earrings) is playing the part of this elder by dressing like one. It makes the add more influential because not only does she look like she’s so old but she feels like she is that age so the premature aging isn’t just an exterior physical thing. Her hair and nails are done which shows she is trying to look her best but the truth is, to look her best all she has to do is quit smoking. Some detonated signs in the setting include a pink birthday cake with a flower and the number candles “42”. The color pink connoted usually stresses youth specifically little girls, which she is not. The candles on the cake usually connote to the age of the person who is sitting behind the cake because it is their birthday. We see here how old the 42-year-old
looks. The plants and sunlight in the backdrop connote to life and nature and these are two things she is killing by lighting that cigarette.

Ignoring the connotations above for a second and only looking at the denotations, the natural reading is a woman using a birthday candle to light her cigarette but it is taking a while because she moves so slowly (look at how worn in the candles are). Then, using the intended reading to look at it a little closer with some connotations and signs, the reading is “smoking causes premature aging, so don’t smoke”, the message that the advertiser is trying to send. Finally, using all of the analysis we gathered above, the critical reading looks at more than just the physical wear and tear but an internal one too. The woman not only looks like she’s 80 but she starts to feel like it. A metonymy for this ad would be replacing the candles with an actual match or lighter. It’s still doing the same function as the flame on the candles do. Smoking slows you down, you don’t feel like your normal self, it’s like you’re a whole new person. Be the person you are meant to be and don’t let any temptations along the way change that. Lastly, I believe this ad is a metaphor for societal temptations and that no matter the age; life is too short and beautiful to not make every moment count. What was cool 30 years ago is not cool today, what is cool is living long healthy lives.